



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Department of Veterans Services

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Commissioner

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Virginia Department of Veterans Services (VDVS) Operations Update for the Joint Leadership Council

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I am deeply grateful for the long and productive partnership between JLC and DVS, and am committed to making this relationship even more successful. The final State budget is still pending, however VVFS is planning for important capacity increases in suicide prevention including the addition of a new ***Suicide Prevention Coordinator*** (2022 JLC top legislative priority) position which will enhance internal and community staff training (i.e. suicide prevention/risk screening and lethal means safety) and direct services delivery; Federal, State, and local stakeholder engagement; and data coordination.

Our activities in DVS are oriented around the Governor's campaign pledge to make Virginia the best place for veterans to "live, work, and raise a family." Operationally, that means that we are oriented around a rephrased version of that objective- we want veterans to "Stay, Work, and Thrive". With my senior leadership team and the Governor's office, we are currently working on stating and refining the specific tasks (called "key results") that will allow us to accomplish those objectives. In layman's terms, we want Virginia veterans to return to Virginia after their service; we want to keep as many veterans who leave service in Virginia here after that service; we want to help veterans get jobs or grow their businesses; and we want to provide the ancillary services that will assist them in their own thriving.

We held a strategic planning session on February 25th, focused on developing these service-line Objectives and Key Results (OKRs). The Governor and Secretary joined us for one of the afternoon out-briefs, noting DVS is among the first state agencies tackling this collaborative goal-setting management methodology.

Virginia Veteran and Family Support (VVFS) program staff returned to regional offices and expanded in person outreach opportunities beginning February 1, 2022. There has been a significant increase in new clients starting in January 2022. In April, there were 129 new clients (an increase of 100%) compared to April 2021 (64 new clients). The total number of clients (including new and existing clients) that VVFS served was 42% higher in April 2022 (372) compared to April 2021 (262). The number of returning clients in the last year has been higher than pre-pandemic years and many of them have had increasingly complex service needs. In April 2022, veterans and families needed assistance with resource connections for housing needs (48%), behavioral health support (10%), benefits assistance (8%), employment (7%), and homeless assistance (6%).

The Benefits team serviced 3,993 in person appointments and walk-ins during the month of April. This number continues to climb as veterans and family members become aware that we are open full time for in person and virtual service. Benefits submitted 1,863 C&P claims in the month of April.

Benefits partnered with the Veterans Administration in Veteran Experience Action Center Community (VEAC) Event. 22 VSRs were the focal point ensuring this event was a tremendous success for our Virginia Veterans. During this 3-day event we served 587 veterans with immediate responses from the VA and community partners. This is the most of the 8 states participating in this event thus far! We also served 29.1% women veterans. This is “by far” the largest number of women veteran served by population in any other participating state. DVS set many “firsts” in this event. We have 204 new veteran clients as a result of this partnership. Benefits continue to initiate new partnerships and work with Military installations for increased presence during TAP and other transition briefings.

The Virginia Values Veterans (V3) and V3 Transition Programs, working closely with the Virginia Chamber, embarked on a robust Hire Vets Now (HVN) Networking Event calendar. There are 23 networking events scheduled on five different military installations. Six events held so far this calendar year with 391 total service member and military spouse attendees. Each HVN event connects approximately 25 V3 Certified Employers directly to transitioning service members and their families. V3 Transition Coordinators and V3 Regional Program Managers attend all events to ensure quality customer service to service members and military spouses as well as our V3 Certified Employers.

The Military Medics and Corpsmen Program (MMAC) assisted 79 Veterans and 5 military spouses to find healthcare-related employment in the Commonwealth to date in FY22. The program also added three new MMAC Partner Health Systems – The National Neuropathy Center, Kaiser Permanente, and Velocity Health.

The Military Education & Workforce Initiative (MEWI) partnered with the Veterans Services Foundation, Tech 4 Troops, and Altria Group to provide 50 refurbished laptops to Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). The first delivery (30 computers) occurred on February 3, 2022. The remaining 20 laptops is scheduled for delivery on August 1, 2022.

As of May 3, 2022, The Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program (VMSDEP) processed 3,757 applications, a 44 percent increase from the number of applications processed in May of 2021. The VMSDEP Staff processed all applications in FY22 within 10 calendar days which is 35 calendar days sooner than applications processed in FY21. The 10-calendar-days processing time-frame for applications was accomplished while maintaining a one-business-day response time-frame for voicemails and emails, ensuring callers were able to speak with a representative at time of call-in, and providing ad hoc training to school officials.

The Military Spouse Liaison continues to conduct outreach and advocacy on behalf of military spouses and families in the Commonwealth. During April’s Month of the Military Child (MOMC), the Liaison organized an agency-wide Purple Up Day on April 20, and invited V3 employers and GAMVC members to participate as well. Purple Up Day showed support and agency unity for the 200,000 military children that call Virginia home. The Liaison has also created an internal agency working group to create events, services, and resources for military caregivers in support of a proposed proclamation for Virginia to become the 9th Hidden Heroes State with the Elizabeth Dole Foundation. She is collaborating with Blue Star Families (BSF) to be the first state to bring the BSF Welcome Week

Campaign statewide to include Northern Virginia, Hampton Roads, and Ft. Lee in welcoming the recently PCS'd military families to those areas this fall.

The annual women veterans pinning ceremony was held in person during the Virginia Women Veteran Recognition Week, March 20-26, 2022 at the Virginia War Memorial. This was the fifth annual celebration with our community partners, V3 employers, Virginia legislators, and local veteran service organizations. Lieutenant Governor Winsome Sears joined Senator Jen Kiggans, Delegate Kathleen Murphy, and Delegate Jackie Glass to honor over 70 women veterans with a "Virginia Women Veterans Lead The Way" pin.

The 2022 Virginia Women Veteran summit will be on June 15, 2022, at the Richmond Convention Center. The event theme is "Empowered: Sisters in Arms Inspiring Generations." The focus of the effort in 2022 is to holistically connect women veterans to services. In addition, we want to identify any gaps in services that we can target for enhancement in building partner resources.

We hired the Administrator for the Jones & Cabacoy Veterans Care Center in Virginia Beach and will bring on board the Administrator for the Puller Veterans Care Center in Fauquier County next month, with targeted "Month 1" (first residents) in the October/November timeframe. We will be holding community open houses prior to opening, and invite you all to join us.

The Virginia War Memorial will host the 66th Annual Commonwealth's Memorial Day Ceremony on Monday, May 30 at 11 a.m. We invite you to join us in person or to watch the broadcast on CBS TV-6 Richmond or streaming on the DVS Facebook page.

Virginia's three state veterans cemeteries will also host special ceremonies on Memorial Day, beginning at 9:30 a.m. at the Southwest Virginia Veterans Cemetery (Dublin), at 10 a.m. at the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery (Suffolk), and at 10 a.m. at the Virginia Veterans Cemetery (Amelia). We cordially invite you to attend one of these ceremonies.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dan. Gade", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Daniel Gade, PhD.